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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (02/23): The Europeans start to take a more active role in the peace process

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Main Stories:

-----The dailies lead with news on Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas' meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris yesterday. The reports note that both Presidents agreed that peace in the region cannot be attained without negotiations. Leading headlines in Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida quote Sarkozy noting that he agreed with Abbas on goodwill gestures to support pushing the peace process forward. Abbas is quoted in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida's headline stating that negotiations come first and then a declaration of the state. Abbas and Sarkozy noted that the two state solution is the best mechanism to ensure a Palestinian state that lives side by side with Israel in peace and security. Al-Quds runs a headline quoting Sarkozy warning of a third intifada in the Palestinian territories if the situation doesn't improve.

Al-Ayyam runs front page news on an article published by the French newspaper Le Monde reporting that both the French and Spanish Foreign Ministers stated that Europe must bear some responsibilities for the peace efforts (in addition to the US) and must set a clear timeframe for resuming negotiations. Both Ministers also suggested that the EU hold a peace summit.

The dailies continue to report on the Palestinian condemnation of the Israeli decision to add two holy sites in the West Bank to a list of national heritage sites within its "Plan to Rehabilitate and Strengthen Israel's National Heritage Infrastructure." Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that the PA cabinet condemned the Israeli announcement during its weekly meeting yesterday. Reports note that a number of Palestinians protesting the decision in Hebron were injured yesterday during confrontations. Reports note that one Israeli soldier was injured during the confrontations.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida and Al-Ayyam report that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called President Abbas yesterday to reiterate the US commitment to reach a fair solution to the Palestinian cause through negotiations which will lead to 2 states living side by side in peace and security.

The Palestinian press reports that the European Commission allocated 52 million Euros for immediate humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territories.

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BLOCK QUOTE:

-----Editor-in-Chief of Al-Hayat Al-Jadida Hafeth Al-Barghouti opines in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida today under the title "The European Position" that the recent European (Spanish-French) initiative to recognize the Palestinian state comes as a response to the US retreat from its commitments and pledges. Al-Barghouti believes that this initiative is a threat to the US and Israel and proof that the Palestinian state can be established even with Israeli stubbornness and the US retreat

RUBINSTEIN